

East Menlo Park tenants to Zuckerberg: Facebook is helping to displace us

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MENLO PARK — Low-income tenants living near Facebook’s campus are speaking out, including to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, to help stop their landlords from displacing them from their homes.

A group of tenants living in four buildings in Menlo Park are pleading to the media and on Facebook to stop a huge rent increase which will force families out of their longtime residences. Sandra Zamora, a member of the Redwood Landing Tenant Union, [penned a letter on her Facebook profile](#) to Zuckerberg saying Facebook’s campus expansion has “extremely affected” their current predicament.

“Right now there are many families that have been displaced and many more waiting to become homeless because there is not rent control in Menlo Park and because Facebook has affected the most vulnerable communities in East Menlo Park,” wrote Zamora. “These families work two or three jobs just to keep up with basic needs and now with the rent increments these families, whose are children, adults and seniors are on the verge (of becoming) collateral damage.”

The tenants are only the latest group of low-income residents in the Bay Area speaking out against Silicon Valley giants for their housing troubles. Many argue tech companies are the reason rents are increasing, which are forcing some working people out of the Bay Area, or into homelessness.

Earlier this month, security guards — some of whom are homeless and are contracted to work at Facebook’s campus at near-minimum wages — [protested in San Jose](#), arguing tech companies have a responsibility to combat the housing crisis.

Zamora and members of the Redwood Landing Tenant Union are mostly low-income, Latino residents who have lived in their residences for more than 10 years — before Facebook became the Silicon Valley behemoth it is today.

Zamora, a pre-school teacher and restaurant worker, told The Guardian that a new landlord significantly raised their rents while advertising their proximity to the campus. The buildings are located in the Belle Haven neighborhood of Menlo Park, less than two miles from Facebook’s campus.

Zamora and Facebook did not respond to a request for comment from this news organization.

The new landlords Menlo Gate and Redwood Landing Properties, among others, issued notices to tenants that their rents will rise from \$1,100 to \$1,900 a month, and that they would have to leave in 60 days if they didn’t sign a lease, [according to The Guardian](#).

Seven of the 20 families in the buildings moved out of their homes in the past month, and most of the remaining residents believe they won’t be able to stay longer than a year, said Nazanin Salehi, a housing attorney at the Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA) who represented the union.

Despite forming a union, the tenants have little legal recourse to push back against the rent hike, as they do not have rent control protections, according to The Guardian. But the tenants union did negotiate with the landlord to push back the rent hike from starting in August, rather than in June, and to receive relocation assistance, according to Salehi.

“It’s just devastating,” said Salehi. “The real estate market is either displacing people or putting them in one emergency away from being homeless. They are one car accident or medical bill from being unable to stay.”

In 2016, Facebook committed \$20 million over the next five years for affordable housing, job training and assistance for tenants at risk of losing their homes in East Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

Facebook pledged to construct affordable housing in its campus expansion adjacent to Belle Haven neighborhood in March. In its upcoming campus dubbed Willow Village in Menlo Park, east of Highway 101, Facebook plans to build at least 1,500 housing units — [and at least 225 units below market rate](#).

That same month, Facebook’s then-vice president of public policy Elliott Schrage [said in a press release](#) that Facebook and its partners provided \$500,000 to CLSEPA to support Belle Haven and East Palo Alto residents threatened with displacement from evictions or abuse by landlords as part of the \$20 million commitment.

Zamora, in her Facebook letter to Zuckerberg, said she hoped that the billionaire will take personal action in helping their preserve their homes in Menlo Park.

“If Mr. Mark Zuckerberg cares about what happens in the community in which he has settled his (billions-dollar) business, he would not hesitate to say a word and reflect on the deep concerns of the community that is suffering from a business effect,” wrote Zamora.